

Happy New Year! With the legislative getting revved up, here is a comprehensive look at transportation issues and the leadership's priorities. Jack Briggs - jackbriggs @mchsi.com -===-

On the first day of session Speaker of the House of Representatives, Rod Jetton (R-Marble Hill), presented his vision of this year's legislative activities to the members of the House. Likewise, Senate President Pro Tem Michael Gibbons (R-Kirkwood) also shared his views of the upcoming session with members of the Senate.

Both opening day speeches follow.

House Speaker Rod Jetton:

I would like to take a moment to formally introduce some distinguished guests. First I would like to introduce a veteran of our nation's military that I am honored to have in attendance today, Jason Brown. Next I want to introduce the Governor of Missouri, Governor Matt Blunt. In attendance with Governor Blunt are other statewide officials who are honoring this chamber with their presence. Also in attendance are Supreme Court Justices. I would like to extend a special introduction to my wife Cassie, my two daughters Emily and Callie, and my son Will. I would also like to introduce my parents, Bill and Judy Jetton. Finally it is my pleasure to introduce my father and mother-in-law, Frank and Marie, and my sister and brother-in-law Josh and Lottie.

As I stand before you today at the opening of the 2007 legislative session my mind goes back two years when you first elected me Speaker.

What a difference two years makes. What a difference you have made in two years we have changed laws that have made Missouri a much better place to live and raise a family, and I am proud to lead a Missouri House of Representatives that worked together to truly make a real difference for our citizens.

Two years ago we were the last state in America when it came to job creation. We lost 70,000 jobs in one year. Two years ago our budget was more than a billion dollars short and we faced having to cut millions of dollars in spending each year. Two years ago Missouri families were threatened by Meth production that leads the nation. Two years ago our state had a bloated Medicaid system with over one million Missourians and was in danger of bankrupting our state. Two years ago we had the second worst roads and the third worst bridge system in America. These bad roads jeopardized the life of our families and hurt our economy. And let's not forget education. Just a few short years ago 1/3 of our 4th graders could not read proficiently for their grade level, and our school funding formula was a disaster.

We looked for solutions to tackle these problems and together we accomplished a great deal. First we fixed our economy and put people back to work. We did this by instituting tort reform, work comp reform, and unemployment comp reform. We created the Quality Jobs Act. We have added over 45,000 jobs in Missouri since January 2005. In August 2005 Missouri had the largest increase in employment nationally. Today our employment rate is 5.1% and has been as low as 4.4%.

Next we reduced spending by cutting waste, fraud and abuse and by improving programs. We cut spending on the lottery and sales went up. We cut millions in lease payments on sweetheart deals. We shrunk the state workforce to less than 60,000, and we sought to reform Medicaid that saved us \$138 million which was previously frauded from the system.

What has been the result of managing our tax dollars better? The best budget in seven years. We ended 2006 with almost \$300 million dollars ahead of projections and had a 9% growth rate in 2006. This growth should give us over \$300 million surplus, headed into 2007.

So, what have we done with some of the extra money and savings? We have provided low-income energy assistance, given more money to the Meals on Wheels program. We have restored eye care for Medicaid. We have given a 4% pay raise for state employees. Instituted a

2% increase to higher education funding, and we have increased funding to secondary and elementary education. When we are not facing billion dollar shortfalls it's amazing what happens. We also take pride in one other fact. We fixed this budget, put people back to work and now have a significant surplus. All without rising taxes.

We also fixed our schools and passed a new funding formula. This new formula adds over \$900 million to schools over 7 years. Every school district in Missouri receives more money under this plan. Last year we passed the largest education budget in our state's history, but it also adds accountability to make sure we are getting the biggest bang for our buck. We also created the Classroom Trust Fund. The good news is that MAP Test scores are up and graduation rates are improving.

Stopping crime and improving public safety was another huge priority for us. We led the charge on stopping Methamphetamine production. We passed Jessica's Law to protect our youngest citizens. We passed stronger DWI laws. We also implemented the right to carry fix. We have reduced Meth incidents by over 40%, our children are now safer from sex offenders and we are getting repeat drunk drivers off our streets.

Also there has not been one instance of a permitted right to carry individual committing any crimes or causing problems. But there have been folks who defended themselves and stopped crimes, which is exactly what we hoped would happen if we passed this law.

Another area that I am very proud of, but can be a bit controversial is the abortion and life issue. We have a strong Pro-Life majority made up of both Democrats and Republicans in the House. We passed several bills aimed at making abortions rare. There is now a 24-hour wait for abortion. There is also a 30-mile radius to conduct abortions. Parental consent is now required for minors to get an abortion. It is also now illegal for minors to cross state lines to get an abortion.

These bills are working. We have gone from several abortion clinics a few years ago to just three today. And for the first time in years Missouri conducted less than 8,000 abortions last year. President Bill Clinton, an abortion supporter, always said his goal was to make abortions rare. Well, in Missouri thanks to your hard work we are doing just that.

I could go on and on listing some of the good things we did over the last two years. Such as stopping Eminent Domain abuse, creating Insurance reform, putting in place an Associated Healthcare Plans, passing the Ethanol standard, Highway reform through the Amendment 3 initiative, providing Emissions reforms, property tax relief for seniors, and creating the link deposit program. On all of these issues we worked together. Believe it or not many received bipartisan votes and passed with huge majorities. In fact Minority Leader Harris and I voted together over 70% of the time, as did myself and Representatives Donnelly, Skaggs, and Zweifel.

We made these changes together but there is still more to do. We can cut taxes on Social Security Benefits. We are one of only fifteen states that still tax these benefits. Our seniors have already paid taxes on this money once. It's not fair to have them pay twice and they need our help.

We need to improve Senior Citizen Nutrition; believe it or not for many seniors getting enough to eat each day is a real problem. The food stamp program is failing some of our poorest seniors.

We need to step in and help those who have worked so hard to make Missouri successful.

We need to institute teacher liability protection. Discipline is a major problem for teachers in the classroom. Too many parents don't seem to care about their kid's behavior or education. Many times this negatively affects the learning for the rest of the class. We need laws that will protect teachers from these children and remove them from the classroom so the children who want to learn can. It is sad when two or three kids ruin the education of the other twenty. Let's protect our teachers.

It is time to deal with the St. Louis public schools crisis. For too long these schools have been failing the children of St. Louis. Each time a solution is offered the bureaucrats in charge ask for more time and make excuses for their failures. We can't wait any longer. These children can't wait any longer. Now is the time to act.

It is also time to establish English as the official language of Missouri. English is the one thing that brings all Americans together. Having all our citizens learn English will not only help our newest citizens fit in, but it will make our whole state more competitive with the world. This is the year we should pass this bill.

We need to provide more and better college scholarships. College tuition is growing out of control for many families. We should follow Georgia's lead and provide a scholarship to all Missouri students who want to attend college in Missouri. Help me keep our best and brightest right here at home.

We need to continue stopping Medicaid fraud. We need to pass a bill that will stop fraud and still make sure our poorest citizens have access to quality healthcare. We should allow citizens and workers who spot fraud to keep some of the savings, and those who commit fraud should be fined and face criminal prosecution for the worst cases. But we need to protect doctors from civil lawsuits that might discourage them from seeing Medicaid patients. Today is the day we end fraud in Missouri.

Things are better because of us. I am sure none of the bills we passed were exactly like each of us wanted them. However, there were lots of changes debated; some may have went the way you wanted while others didn't. But in the end the results speak for themselves.

Two years ago we were the number one job loss state in America. Now we have more Missourians working.

Two years ago our budget was over a billion dollars short and we faced each year having to cut millions of dollars in spending. Last year revenues were nearly a \$300 million dollar surplus, and we are going into next year with at least a \$300 million dollar surplus.

We've gone from several abortion clinics to just three today, and there will be less abortions performed in Missouri this year than any year since 1975.

Two years ago we were the number one Meth producing state in America. Today Meth incidents are down 40% and our kids have a much better chance of not getting hooked on that life-ending drug.

Two years ago we had the second worst roads and the third worst bridge system in America. Finally we are building roads and repairing bridges thanks to the reforms that have changed MoDOT. This will help our economy prosper, but more importantly our families will be safer. Let's not forget education. Just a few short years ago 1/3 of our 4th graders could not read proficiently for their grade level, and our school funding formula was a disaster. Today, we have a new formula based on student need and district performance. Finally our kids have a better chance for learning and we are spending millions more in the classroom with added accountability.

All this was accomplished with no new taxes. All the critics said our state budget was in a mess and the only way to fix it was by raising taxes. We've seen several ballot initiatives trying to get voters to raise taxes. They all failed. Voters told us not to raise taxes. They wanted us to make changes and manage the state better. That is just what we did.

With no tax increases we have: more people working, a budget surplus, less crime, better roads and bridges, lower property taxes for seniors, more money for education, increased funding for senior nutrition and better pay for state workers. There is still more to do, there are obstacles to overcome. Together as Republicans and Democrats we will debate the big issues, argue the

merits of bills, and keep fighting to make Missouri the best place in America; to start a business, to raise a family, and to enjoy life.

President Pro Tem of the Senate Michael Gibbons:

Lt. Governor Kinder, Judge Russell, Members of the Missouri Senate, our families, friends, and people of Missouri:

As we take our places in this magnificent chamber, I want to thank you for entrusting this position of leadership to me as we move into a pivotal time in our state's history. I particularly appreciate the support of the Senator from the 5th, who will also continue as our Minority Leader. Working together, we have made improvements to the civility in the Missouri Senate and will continue working together to maintain an environment where the difficult issues we face can be debated vigorously and decisions made with civility and respect.

We welcome back our returning members, and extend a special welcome to our five new members, the newly-elected Senators from Nodaway County, the 12th District; Monroe County, the 18th District; Jefferson County, the 22nd District; Jackson County, the 10th District; and the City of St. Louis, the 4th District. You are joining an institution that has served the people of Missouri for 186 years and is known as the place where complex issues come to find a common sense solution.

It may sound easy, but the issues that really matter generally do not have easy answers. It is a struggle for each of us on our own, and all of us together, to determine what is right and best for the future of all the people we represent.

It should come as no surprise that our work here involves struggle. We come from various backgrounds and beliefs. Each of us represents approximately 165,000 people from very different parts of Missouri, and we have different ideas on how to address the issues we face.

So, why are we here? We come together in this historic chamber to give voice to the hopes and dreams of all the people of Missouri. We were elected so we could rise at our desk, to introduce bills, propose amendments, engage in debate, to offer our ideas on what we believe to be best. When we offer these ideas, we do not offer them for ourselves, but on behalf of the people we represent. As a result, each idea deserves to be heard; although, each idea does not necessarily deserve our support. Support for a proposition must be earned, and the success of the idea is demonstrated by our vote. We debate the idea and a decision is made. This is what the people expect. This is what the people deserve.

In the recent national election, the voters said very clearly that it is time to address serious issues in a serious way. Refusing to address key issues, whether by insisting that we "stay the course," or by the few using legislative maneuvers to prevent action, are wrong, and the people know it. We are here in a position to make a difference at the dawn of the 21st Century. Our first two years have seen serious work done on the foundation for this future and it is proving to be a good start. More people are working, and the future looks bright. But there are trouble spots ahead that we must do something about.

Thomas Jefferson in the majestic words of the Declaration of Independence wrote:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the Governed.

Governments in America exist to secure these fundamental rights, and in the Missouri Senate, the voters have entrusted this power to us. Therefore, we need to take bold action where great threats to these unalienable rights are found to protect the people of Missouri. One such threat is to our health. Without the opportunity for good health, our fundamental rights to Life, Liberty and

the Pursuit of Happiness are diminished or lost. We have already said that the poor deserve better, and set a plan in motion with great urgency to reform our failing Medicaid system.

Medicaid began in Missouri in 1968, but it is not 1968 anymore. It is the 21st Century, and a healthcare plan that only provides treatment when sickness or disease attacks is inadequate, dangerous and a direct assault on our unalienable rights. Today, all of us working together, Republicans and Democrats, can boldly enter the future, with a focus on the people rather than on big government, big healthcare providers, and big insurance companies. We can focus on protecting health by concentrating on prevention and wellness in addition to treatment. And this is not just a problem for the poor. We must declare war on the high cost of healthcare. The healthcare marketplace that exists today between big providers, big government and big insurance companies is creating a burden the people cannot carry. More are exposed to being uninsured because neither the people themselves nor their employers can afford the skyrocketing costs. We must return the power over this critical part of life to the people, empowering them with knowledge about quality, cost and results, and focusing on prevention and wellness. We can take the people off of the healthcare conveyor belt and put them back in the driver's seat when it comes to choices and decisions on their health and the health of their families.

Another threat to our fundamental rights are the failing school districts in our state. In a rapidly changing global marketplace where the United States should be the leader in the new knowledge economy, education is the key to success. The future looks bright for those who have a good education. But those who do not, I'm sad to say, will be left behind with only poverty, prison, or an early death to look forward to. Such hopelessness is unacceptable. Failing to make positive changes now is criminal. Moreover, a good education belongs to the person who earned it. No one can take it away.

As we look at the Special Advisory Committee's report on the St. Louis City public schools, and knowing that the state school board will be considering what action to take in response, it has been interesting to see the attacks against a recent appointee to the State School Board. She apparently holds beliefs that the education establishment opposes. We know what they are against. But what are they for?

Looking at the City of St. Louis Schools, are they in favor of graduating barely one half of the students in the district? Are they pleased that only 1 out of 4 that do graduate go on to some post high school program? Do they know that, according to the chancellor of the St. Louis Community College, that of those with diplomas that go to his school, many spend up to 18 months in remedial programs just to be able to start their 2-year associate's degree? We are allowing the St. Louis City public schools, which serve a large and very vulnerable population of students, to drive the final nail into the coffins of their futures. This failure is an outrage.

Unfortunately, St. Louis is not alone. In fact, 12 other school districts across Missouri are in similar shape. It is an outrage in every failing district in Missouri.

So, what should we be for? We should be for reforms that give the students in failing districts a chance at a world-class education with a focus on academic achievement and accountability for results. We should be open to any solution, any solution, that will improve the opportunities for these students. We hear too much about school boards, administrators, principals, teachers or other employees. Our primary concern must be for the children. We challenge everyone interested in protecting these children to come forward to work with us to find common sense solutions today. A good education is the best hope for a life of liberty in which the people can truly have an opportunity to pursue happiness. We must protect their education and have high expectations for academic achievement in all of our schools, so that nearly every student in Missouri graduates with a diploma that means he or she has mastered the fundamental skills necessary to enter today's world, and that they are ready for the next step.

The students in failing districts need us to act now. Their lives and futures depend on us. Many other critical issues will come before us this year and we will all, at some time, be challenged to our core on what is the right thing to do. And we will challenge each other and our

ideas as we stand here on behalf of our constituents, struggling to take right actions for the future of the people of Missouri. When we come together in session, one of my goals is to have everyone pay more attention to the issues at hand. That means putting down BlackBerrys, cell phones and other distractions, and being prepared to debate the bills before us. Out of respect for the people who elected us, it is the least we can do.

Everyone here worked hard and devoted every ounce of energy to win their election. Millions of dollars and thousands of volunteers helped us win. Millions of dollars and thousands of volunteers worked hard to defeat us. At the end of the day, in each of our Senate Districts, the people chose us and have given us their consent to make decisions, to represent their interests, to secure their rights, and to provide for a hopeful future.

We have a solemn duty to find common sense solutions to the complex issues we face. In this effort we must succeed. Working together we will. It is what the people expect. It is what the people deserve.

SENATOR McKENNA SWORN INTO OFFICE: Sen. Ryan McKenna (D-Crystal City), son of former Sen. Bill McKenna, and chair of the Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission, was sworn into office on Jan. 3.

Sen. McKenna is the third generation of McKenna's who have served in the Missouri legislature. His Grandfather, J. Glennon McKenna, served in the Missouri House in 1941 and 1942. Ryan's father, William (Bill) P. McKenna, served in the Missouri House from 1982 until 1993 and then won election to the Missouri Senate. There he served in the Missouri Senate for five years (1993 to 1998) and was elected to serve as Senate President Pro Tem in 1997 and 1998.

COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS: With this being the first week of the 2007 legislative session, there were no House or Senate committee assignments made for the elected officials.

GOVERNOR'S REVIEW COMMISSION - INTERDEPARTMENTAL COUNCIL'S CREATED: As a result of the Governor's 2005 Review Commission recommendations designed to make Missouri government more efficient, several interdepartmental coordination councils have been formed to work on the implementation of some of those recommendations. MoDOT is represented on several councils as follows:

- Information Technology Board - This council was created by Gov. Blunt through Executive Order 06-34 for the purpose of providing technology services and solutions for departments and agencies of the state to better serve their customers. The focus of the discussion will center on application development, disaster recovery, cyber security and information security, data management, end user support and help desks, main frame and data centers, network and telecommunications operations and usage, server management and email. Additionally the board is to work to better coordinate and update the state's use of information technology for better customer service to the users of state services. No final report has been submitted.
- Interdepartmental Coordination Council for Job Creation and Economic Growth - This council was created by Gov. Blunt through Executive Order 06-35 for the purpose of better coordinating the state's efforts to create jobs and promote economic growth in Missouri.. The council has suggested performance strategies and final strategies are to be determined by June 30, 2007. No final report has been submitted.
- Interdepartmental Coordination Council for Rural Affairs - This council was established by Gov. Blunt through Executive Order 06-37 for the purpose of addressing rural needs in Missouri, including coordination of rural transportation planning and projects. With respect to rural transportation, the council will look at navigation on the Mississippi River, regional planning needs and objectives for rural Missouri, and the possible use of public/private investment and partnerships in rural transportation. No final report has been submitted.

- Interdepartmental Coordination Council for State Employee Career Opportunity - This council was created by Gov. Blunt through Executive Order 06-38 for the purpose of reassessing Missouri's Merit System. Though MoDOT is represented on this council it is believed they primary focus will be on merit agencies only.

- Interdepartmental Coordination Council for State Service Delivery Efficiency - This council was created by Gov. Blunt through Executive Order 06-40 for the purpose of establishing criteria with respect to privatization of state services. The council submitted a letter to Gov. Blunt dated Dec. 27th, stating the council's objectives are to review the current privatization efforts in Missouri State Government, research successful privatization efforts in other state governments, establish state government-wide criteria for when privatization of state service should be considered, and create an ongoing system for collecting feedback from Missourians regarding the quality of the state services they are receiving. No final report has been submitted.

- Interdepartmental Coordination Council for Water Quality - This council was created by Gov. Blunt through Executive Order 06-41 for the purpose of better coordinating the state's water protection and water resources. A report was submitted by the council to governor Blunt in December 2006 recommending the reactivation of The Water Resource Law Interagency Taskforce to direct and continue state water planning, water protection, and revisit lessons learned from the floods of 1993 and 1995.

CONGRESSIONAL UPDATE: The 110th U.S. Congress convened into session on Jan. 4. Both the House and Senate switched from Republican to Democratic control with Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) becoming the first woman Speaker of the House of Representatives. The Senate majority leader is Harry Reid (D-NV).

Missouri's congressional delegation had one change with Sen. Claire McCaskill (D) replacing Sen. Jim Talent (R). At this point, it appears Missouri will continue to have Sen. Christopher "Kit" Bond in a ranking position on transportation authorizing and appropriating committees. In the House, the transportation committee includes Missouri's Russ Carnahan (D) and Sam Graves (R).

Congress's early agenda is focused on Health Care, Stem Cell Research, Minimum Wage, Ethic's rules and 9/11 Commission recommendations. Other major items that loom over congress is the passage of FY '07 appropriations and funding for the War in Iran and Afghanistan. The early-identified congressional agenda items do not include any major transportation initiatives.

UPCOMING TRANSPORTATION EVENTS:

- January 24 - Gov. Blunt's State of the State Address
- February 7 - Director Rahn's State of Transportation Address
- February 15- Annual Transportation Conference
- March 15 to March 26 - Legislative Spring Break
- May 18 - Last day of the 2007 legislative session